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AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR OVERSEAS AID

EAST TIMOR SUB-COMMITTEE

REPORT - 1979 COUNCIL (COUNCIL PAPER.no.1

Member agencies of ACFOA were invited to a meeting on 12th July, 1979, to discuss the situation in East Timor. The meeting was held at the Catholic Archdiocesan Centre in Melbourne and fourteen people attended.

At this meeting, a report compiled for A.W.D. was presented as the basis for discussion. This report was an attempt to pull together all the available information regarding the humanitarian needs of the people inside East Timor. For some considerable time, reports had been received indicating a very desperate situation.

The meeting agreed to present this report to the ACFOA Executive Meeting and to ask that ACFOA:

(1) Seek an appointment with the Minister for Foreign Affairs;

(2) Request the return of ICRC to East Timor;

(3) Seek to have Australia raise the question of East Timor with the United Nations Human Rights Committee;

(4) Seek to have Australian Government aid given through Indonesian Red Cross evaluated and seek to have the Australian Government consider development aid as well as relief aid;

(5) make a Press statement regarding the situation in East Timor.

ACFOA EXECUTIVE

At the ACFOA Executive Meeting held in Canberra on July 15th and 16th, it was agreed:

(i) - that ACFOA adopt the report as its own. It was noted that the wider distribution of the report as an ACFOA document might have implications for some of the organisations mentioned in the report and it was agreed thatRienze Rupasinghe and Bill Armstrong would look into this.

(ii) - that an ACFOA delegation should meet with the Minister for Foreign Affairs to discuss the present situation.

(iii) - that a Press statement would be issued detailing ACFOA's concerns regarding East Timor and that this statement would be made in conjunction with the visit to the Minister and in accordance with the contents of Aid and East Timor and/or the Enquiry's report.

MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

Father Mark Raper - who had been associated with the production of the report - Mr. Bob Whan, the Executive Director of ACFOA, and I met with Mr. Peacock in Canberra on the 13th September (the Chairman of ACFOA, Mr. Richard Alston, was unfortunately unable to attend).

At this meeting, Mr. Peacock agreed that the situation as he understood it was not good, but said that he would seek further information and meet our delegation again in five or six weeks' time.

CONCLUSION

The situation of the East Timorese is desperate. Some observers have claimed that the conditions in the camps are worse than those which exist in the refugee camps in Thailand. Several reports speak of thousands being left to die because there is no hope.

Like the situation in Kampuchea, the problem is not simply one of food and medical supplies not being available. It is one of politics. International agencies have not until now been allowed into East Timor, and the ICRC operation is extremely limited. This programme is detailed and evaluated in the attached document. Australia and other countries have not been prepared to challenge Indonesia over its actions in East Timor, and all visits to East Timor have been tightly controlled and quite clearly stage-managed by the Indonesian Army which controls East Timor.

For a long time, one of our major requests was for internationally recognised aid agencies to be allowed into East Timor. It is true that two such organisations have been permitted to operate in East Timor, namely ICRC and CRS (Catholic Relief Services).

(a) ICRC:

A more detailed evaluation of this programme is attached. In summary, it is extremely limited, with only two medical personnel and one aid administrator on the ground in East Timor.

(b) CRS:

This programme cannot be regarded an an independent non-government operation. It is a government-to-government programme operated between USAID and the Indonesian army. In any case, it is a very small programme - the first stage (and there is no guarantee that there will be further stages) is in total $US.700,000.

RESOLUTION

In view of the disturbing reports on the situation in East Timor and the obvious limitations of existing and proposed aid programmes to that country, this Council requests the ACFOA Executive to press for permission to conduct its own survey of the situation in East Timor or, should that be unacceptable, that ACFOA facilitate an international team for the purposes of such a survey and that ACFOA itself seek to be represented in that team.

Bill Armstrong.
Convenor,
East Timor Sub-Committee.

4/10/79